How is art/tech work reaching the public?

January 2025

Contents

Cover Image: Matthew Usher photography - Co-created projections as part of Collusion's Manifesto, King's Lynn (2022)

Collusion asked Flow Associates to undertake research into the current context of practice, commissioning and accessing art/tech works, and make this available for others to use.

What do we mean by art/tech? Artwork, any artform, where technology is used in a practice led way to create experiences for the public. We are interested in physical work that the public needs to engage with in a particular location. We are excluding purely digital work that is experienced on the internet only. Artworks in this field can take a wide variety of forms, lengths and locations: from traditional venues to outdoor works and festivals, 10 minutes to an hour or more, using technology subtly or more substantially.

The pipeline for making practice-led art/tech work is broken, if indeed it ever existed. Alongside access to a range of expertise and resources, the cost of living crisis and subsequent hypercompetition for funding has led us to a situation where creativity, innovation and production is stifled by the lack of access to funding, whether application led or venue commissioned.

Further, where traditional commissioning is taking place for art/tech work, the 'deliver this as a finished piece by X' is failing to account for the iterative nature of art/tech work that requires more R&D and audience testing over a longer period of time to reach a truly finished state. As an emerging sector, when compared with a traditional sector such as dance or visual arts, there also appears not to be a strong shared understanding of who the key players and networks are in this field, with an apparent lack of connection and collaboration.

Photo credit: Jo Nancarrow - ART //TECH //PLAY Stand Up for Diversity event, DanceEast (2024)

Context

Making Space for Creative R&D

Art which incorporates technology or digital aspects has a unique set of challenges in its process of creative development and production. For many artists, particularly emerging artists, the barriers to being able to produce and present a fully formed and tested piece of work are difficult to overcome. This has the effect of hampering ambition, creativity and confidence from the artist's side, while from the platform, gallery or exhibitor's position, there can be the perceived risk of presenting poorly developed and unstable works which can harm reputation, commercial activity or the audience's experience.

R&D for art-tech projects often requires significant upfront investment, and securing funding for experimental or interdisciplinary work can be difficult. Funding bodies have begun to offer funds which recognise this, supporting the research stages of projects with a view to iterative funding opportunties which enable them to move through production stages.

In creating a space for R&D, models which are successful recognise:

- **Providing equipment and technology removes barriers:** often emerging technologies and theatre or exhibition quality equipment is expensive and inaccessible to most artists. This limits their familiarity with the possibilities of it and not having adequate time for development and testing.

- **The opportunity for diversifying audiences:** Art/tech has the potential to engage those who are less traditionally engaged - men and boys, people from ethnically diverse backgrounds and those facing economic challenges. Recognising this and using R&D to test approaches to appeal to them builds audiences for the future.

- **The barriers that under-represented artists have:** A person's background, ethnicity, gender and disaibilies may all have an impact on them being able to thrive creatively. To achieve fairness, accessibility and opportunity to all, R&D support needs to recognise and remove barriers which may unintentionally be in place.

- **Iterative prototyping as outputs:** The nature of developing art/tech pieces and the interaction of creativity with technology means that work often evolves to meet the limitations or potential of the tools or skills available. Prototyping and testing is not always fully covered by funding which can be considerable when working with new technologies increasing the risks associated with creating new works.

- **Financial risks:** The innovative nature of art/tech works which do not fit into traditional art categories may be more difficult to monetise through touring,

> "
> I always end up building R&D into my work because what other way is there? If I was doing it properly, I'd have the chance to do R&D first and then make the most of a project grant.
>
> Interview, Artist
> "

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Challenges to creating a strong R&D culture and environment :

For Venues and Organisations:

- A challenging funding and economic context mean that when commissioning or funding work, there is can be a need for works to become marketable and presentable in order to generate an income for the artists and host venues. This adds considerable risk to supporting developing works and emerging artists as by its nature, the final output of the piece is undecided and potentially, the tech used may be unproven or untested.

- Running R&D spaces and studios is expensive and in order for work to reach a stage of presentation, the feasibility of providing time, technology and spaces is difficult.

- Being a commissioner or host is more than just providing the resource - they take on the role of expert and potential mentor. To do this effectively, staff need to be well connected, up-to-date, and have a strong understanding of the field that the artists are working in. Along with the many other roles that staff can play within an institution, this is often means that they become stretched and time poor.

- If the organisation is presenting work in progress, how do they balance its unfinished state with maintaining inclusivity and accessibility? Emerging technologies and practices may sometimes embed this at their centre, but other times it can present unexpected challenges. For example, pieces that have used body tracking have been shown to have difficulty in recognising people with darker skin and VR can be unsuitable for young children or those with photosensitive epilepsy.

For artists:

- A lack of established networks of practitioners which can be used to find collaborators and expertise. Art/Tech/Play goes some way to tackling this, with organisations such as Dance East making use of their connections to support the artists they commission.

- The funding available often fails to cover the full costs of creating high-quality work which can go on to be toured and distributed. For example, the Immersive Arts flagship 'Expand' grant has a cap of £50,000 for 12 months of development. Although this is aimed at developed existing or projects and prototypes, the level of funding to bring a work to a tourable state may still be challenging.

- The idea of sharing work in progress is more prevalent in some artforms than others. For example, although theatre may present 'scratch' performances, within dance practices, it is much rarer. These cultural differences between artforms may limit the opportunities for audience testing if they are without precedent for the artist.

- Host and commissioning venues may find it difficult to work with artists who have less experience in pitching their work, ideas and needs to them. This includes a lack of clarity on the type of spaces they need, the equipment required and the types of technical expertise that they may need to draw on.

- Funding may often come with the requirement of public engagement or the inclusion of co-creation. For artists not experienced in it or where it is considered a "nice to have" alongside the work rather than in integral output, it can add undue stresses to the production of high-quality pieces as well as feeling a tokenistic gesture. This can lead to a loss of trust with the audiences or public that it was meant to instead engender.

> " Over the past few years, due to the loss of EU funding and underinvestment in the UK, it's often easier to bring in work from Europe than it is from Glasgow or Coventry. "
>
> Interview, Venue

Challenges to creating a strong R&D culture and environment :

- What do we need to answer to create a thriving and effective R&D environment for art/tech?

- How can we build long lasting learning through formal and informal networks and resources for both artists and organisations so that they can access the knowledge and collaborators they need?

- What can be done to support artists to effectively plan their R&D, helping them to structure and budget the process so that they can make the most of development time?

- Which platforms are best for sharing work in progress of all types in a way that benefits both the artists and the wider public?

- Who is best placed to advocate for longer-term funding and support which creates a pipeline from R&D in to fully formed works which are audience ready and distributable?

Photo credit: Collusion - ART // TECH // PLAY practice day, DanceEast (2024)

Who are your audiences for art/tech?

...and what do they want to experience?

The crossover of art and tech seemingly opens doors for existing audiences to access new types of works and experiences, but also appeals to those that traditional artforms might not motivate to visit or participate in. A problem across venues and organisations is understanding who they are trying to reach with art/tech work, and lacking the insight and data which is going to help them in effectively reaching their potential audiences in a way that is welcoming, accessible and meeting their needs.

This issue is compounded by the fact that most audience data for arts and culture which is collected by DCMS or Arts Council England is not specific to art/tech and instead looks broadly at all available artforms. Data from venues, such as festivals and attractions, is often closely guarded and not publicly accessible hampering greater shared understanding of how audiences can best be reached and served.

- There is an opportunity for a consortium of regional organisations to work together to carry out research at their events to understand who is specifically coming to their art/tech focused presentations.

- By doing so, artists and organisations will have the chance to understand who their existing audiences are and dig deeper into their motivations, needs and experiences.

- Finding out who you are not reaching is always trickier. However, speaking with your audiences at non art/tech events, carrying out focus group of disengaged groups, and identifying gaps will provide much needed knowledge in how you can expand your reach.

Useful questions to answer:

- Who are your most engaged existing audiences for art/tech work? What are their demographics?

- What converts them into active participants or paying customers?

- How can you best reach them?

- Why don't some groups make the leap and engage? What are the biggest barriers that they face?

- What are the price thresholds for people taking part in different types of works and experiences?

> " How do we communicate this work to people who will see these experiences? Who does it speak to? Is it an audience we already have or one that we aren't reaching yet?
>
> Interview, Venue "

What we know about existing audiences...

The Immersive Experience Network worked with Birmingham University to carry out a study of the audiences for immersive, experiential and interactive experiences. This included those who took part in immersive and experiential art, immersive and interactive theatre, location based AR/VR, transmedia, and immersive audio experiences. This may be used to understand some of the drivers for people looking to engage with arts, performance and music in novel ways and who are open to experiencing the creative possibilities that art/tech can offer.

Who they are:

- Audiences tend to be younger than other more traditional artforms, with 75% being under 44 years old. This skew is significant with the younger end of the scale, with 24% being 16 - 24 and 26% being 25 - 34.

- The gender split, like most other cultural and arts engagement, is significantly weighted towards girls/females, although immersive events tend to do better at attracting boys/men than traditional arts (57% - 42.5%).

- They tend to attract more ethnically diverse audiences than traditional arts, with 20% coming from a non-white background, compared to around 14% in traditional arts, and 18% as a proportion of the UK population.

> " As a museum we work at scale - we aim to create mass engagement. We just can't show a half hour VR experience as it won't work for our visitors.

Interview, Venue

Behaviours:

- Audiences are more likely to go to traditional cultural experiences than immersive ones, with it being more of 'special treat'. This is likely due to the higher costs of such experiences and places such as museums and galleries being either free or less expensive, and less likely to require advance booking.

- The top motivations are: something that is value for money, something that can be done with friends, and something which offers a different experience to just watching a screen.

- Value for money is not surprising considering the younger age skew of the potential audience and the challenging economic climate.

- Recognising the creator/company or the IP within it was not a major motivator for taking part. This is encouraging for original creators and for the fact that audiences are open to experiencing work they are not familiar with.

- Location based work is a big draw and adds to the experience and immersion in a work.

- Besides being in immersive environments, the most important part of an experience were a space to enjoy time with friends, the quality of the work or performers, strong narratives and well designed interactivity or gameplay.

Reaching them:

- It's a challenge to explain what exactly you are selling tickets for when you have to describe it in a single image or video.

- Describe instead what they can experience instead - interaction, play, storytelling and communal social aspects.

- Address any questions for newcomers or those dipping their toes in on your website and listings. What will they see, how long will it be, will they be asked to interact?

> " Art and tech is such a wide-ranging activity and that's its strength, its inclusivity...but it's hard to define for people and to get them excited about something which can contain a bit of everything. We can't tell them what it's like - it's an experience.

Interview, Venue

Platforms

Immersive Experiences and Digital Art Spaces

There is a growing public appetite for immersive experiences with commercial attractions such as Framless and Outernet appearing on Oxford Street in London. Although technologies such as VR are continuing to struggle to gain a foothold in venues, projection mapping and large scale projections are establishing themselves as a new, accessible and exciting way to experience art. Spaces such as Bristol's Wake the Tiger Amazement Park are pushing the boundaries of experiential and immersive art, commissioning performance, sculpture, sound and digital interactivity to create a unique proposition of theatre and art show.

Major players include: 180 The Strand, OUTERNET, BOM, Wake the Tiger Amazement Park

Potential:

- **Direct engagement:** Physical spaces allow for a sensory experience, sound, scale, lighting, and physical interaction that digital platforms struggle to replicate. Live interaction with digital installations or technology-based artworks can create a strong emotional impact.

- **Multisensory and tangible experiences:** With immersive art-tech, audiences can engage through multiple senses touch, sight, sound, and even smell making the experience more memorable and impactful.

- **Income generation:** Generally, immersive experiences can command higher ticket prices than other offers, with price points of around £21 - £40 (pg.19).

- **Art as attraction:** As a relatively new proposition, immersive art spaces come without the baggage of being a museum or "art" gallery. This both enables a greater willingness to show art/tech works as well as tempting in new audiences who feel that more traditional art spaces aren't for them.

Challenges:

- **Cultural accessibility:** Physical spaces often require travel, limiting access for those outside of major cities or with mobility issues. There's also the potential for ticket prices to create barriers.

- **High costs:** Organising exhibitions in physical spaces especially large-scale installations or immersive works can be expensive in terms of production, transportation, staffing, and venue rental.

- **Attitudinal and physical barriers:** While physical venues allow for deep engagement, they do place barriers in front of audiences in terms of confidence to visit, feeling welcome, accessibility and transport.

Theatres, Museums and Galleries

Traditional cultural venues, such as theatres art galleries, theatres and museums, have been evolving to incorporate new media and interactive technology into their performances and exhibitions. As well as the development of major permanent spaces devoted to performance, media and art/tech, such as the Tanks at Tate Moder and FACT Liverpool, traditional museum and gallery spaces are exploring how digital technology can reinterpret their spaces and collections. Lively public programming and learning and engagement work can also mean that alongside exhibition or performance there may be the opportunity for more participatory work and development.

Major players include: Tate Modern, V&A, Derby QUAD, FACT Liverpool, Sadler's Wells, The Barbican, Serpentine

Potentials:

- **Broad audiences:** Museums in particular attract a broad range of audiences, with families being particularly strong group.

- **Collaboration opportunities:** The multi-disciplinary professionals in museums set the opportunity for collaborations and ideas between their collections and artists.

- **Cultural relevance:** Being physically present in a venue or at a festival can add a sense of status to a work.

- **Community engagement:** Cultural organisations generally have a public remit to engage the public with their work. This allows for public programming, talks, and workshops, which can help demystify complex technology for general audiences and even involve them in co-creation or production.

- **New ways of looking:** Being able to promote interactive and contemporary works as part of their programme can create exciting marketing content, sharing with their audiences potentially new and unexpected types of experiences over a traditional visit as a spectator or viewer.

Challenges:

- **Limited resources:** The current funding climate has seen belts tighten, meaning less money for commissioning more experimental works.

- **Cultural accessibility**: Although they are public institutions, crossing the threshold of museum or gallery space is still a major barrier for many people.

- **Having technical resource and capabilities:** Venues and locations without an established digital infrastructure of equipment and technicians may struggle to host more complex work. Artists may find the onus is on them to create self-contained works.

- **Buildings:** Many cultural buildings were built without needing to consider technology. As more works are created that use it, these spaces face major challenges in integrating it and accommodating it into their historical architecture.

> We are working somewhere where the building is essentially part of our collection so nothing can be done to it. It's hard to do something we haven't done before - but that is also a strength we can play to.
>
> Interview, Venue

Festivals

Festivals dedicated to media, art, technology, and innovation—such as the Sheffield DocFest or Festival of Digital Arts—offer platforms for showcasing art-tech projects to both niche and broader audiences. Some festivals create the opportunity for R&D and testing, providing a chance for artists to share work in progress. The V&A's Digital Design Weekend as part of London Design Festival explicitly promotes itself as a event to present work in progress, encouraging designers and artists to share work that they want to test, get feedback from the public on whilst being there to speak with the audience about their creative process. This more "lab" type format and informal nature of the festival presents the opportunity to take risks for both the venue and participating artists.

Major players include: Now Play This, Sheffield DocFest, Brighton Festival, Manchester International Festival, V&A Digital Design Weekend

Potentials:

- **Diverse audience:** Festivals attract a broad spectrum of attendees, from industry professionals and tech enthusiasts to casual visitors, offering exposure to different audience groups. They have the potential to reach those audiences who are less likely to engage through venues or events, namely men and boys, young adults and people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

- **Collaboration opportunities:** Many festivals facilitate networking between artists, technologists, and curators, helping foster new collaborations and ideas.

- **Short-term engagement:** Festivals often create a sense of urgency and excitement around limited-time events, which can draw large crowds and media attention.

Challenges:

- **Ephemeral nature:** Festivals are often short-lived, meaning that engagement can be fleeting unless the work is subsequently showcased elsewhere or shared online.

- **Limited resources:** Smaller festivals may not have the budget to support large-scale installations or offer significant compensation to artists.

- **High competition:** Given the popularity of tech-driven events, there may be a high volume of competing works, which can make it harder for individual projects to stand out.

- **Resourcing tech:** Due to the number of works which might be on display, festivals may face a challenge being able to resource all the needed tech with equipment and technicians. This can sometimes lead to artists being asked to provide their own.

> Presenting on a public stage makes their work tangible and allows them to adapt it for something which isn't a gallery format. It's a lab - for the public, not the artists. There is reputational risk in that but you can frame the event in such a way to make it work.
>
> Interview, Venue

Public Space and Urban Interventions

Art/tech pieces in the public realm can be highly impactful, creating new lenses on a sense of place and the ways that people interact with it and each other. Outdoor installations or projections that make use of public spaces, buildings, or landmarks to create large-scale art-tech experiences may take place as part of festivals, celebrations or major events, tending to be temporary interventions on an area.

Perhaps the highest profile example of recent years has been the success of Outernet in Oxford Street, which according to ALVA was in 2023 the most visited cultural attraction in the UK with 6.25 million visitors.

Other non-traditional venues for arts engagement include libraries, community halls, village greens, and town squares. In towns, all community spaces can be seen as potential cultural venues. This is especially pertinent in the national context of declining high street retail and the need attract people into town and city centres. Culture has a huge role to play in providing animation and social interaction. For example, East Suffolk has a rich ecosystem of cultural venues which has the potential to enable them to act as 'hubs'. Partnership work with smaller or non-traditional venues could enable those experiencing rural isolation to access culture on their doorstep.

The use of pop-ups performances, as used by Darkfield for their audio experiences, can bring innovative arts into public spaces. Punchdrunk's Kabeiroi (2017) also used audio to deliver a performance out in the streets of London.

Major players include: Darkfield, Blast Theory, Punchdrunk, Outernet London, Silvia Mercuriali, Lumiere Durgham, Canary Wharf Winter Lights, UK City of Culture

Potentials:

- **Mass engagement:** They allow for spontaneous and communal interaction with art in everyday spaces.

- **Community involvement:** Interactive urban interventions can foster a sense of community and shared experience, especially if they involve local participation or represent local culture.

- **Branding and sponsorship opportunities:** Such works may attract corporate sponsorship or partnerships with urban developers, creating potential revenue streams for artists and curators. Outernet London regularly partners with brands to produce content and commission takeovers of the space.

- **Mobile tech:** AR based and audio works can be delivered via the audience's own devices negating the need for installation.

- **Opening access:** Public art installations can engage people who might not normally visit a gallery or museum. Art/tech has the potential to reach audiences that are less likely to cross the threshold into more formal spaces - including men and boys, people from the Global Majority, young people, and those who see finances as a barrier.
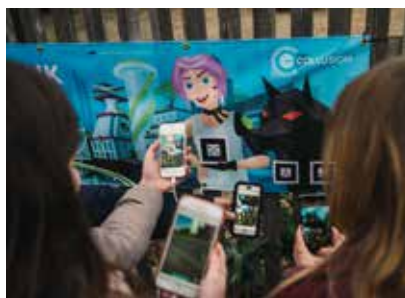

Photo credit: Collusion - Augmented reality trail The Brink of the Future, Wisbech (2017)

Challenges:

- **Vandalism or weather exposure:** Outdoor art-tech works are often exposed to environmental factors or risk of vandalism, which can disrupt the artwork's integrity.

- **Permission and regulations:** Public art often requires navigating complex permissions and regulations, especially in high traffic or commercial spaces.

- **Short engagement:** Interactions in public spaces tend to a short duration and be transitory. This favours certain types of works whilst also potentially limiting the narrative abilities of pieces.

Creating a pipeline for work

Organisations and artists have recognised that the pipeline for new works is broken. From commissioning or R&D, the journey for work reaching a final form for presentation and touring is proving to feel more like an impossible task where ambition is hampered by constraints of funding, expertise and a joined up ecosystem for art/tech.

This section explores an example model for establishing a pipeline where R&D, partnerships and a regional approach could shape an economy and network of art/tech practice which supports works moving from concept to performance and exhibition.

Defining your purpose

What is the big change that you want to bring about and who is that for?

Exploring a model for an Art/Tech network

What format could a network take and how will it deliver the pupose you have set out to achieve?

Leading the way

Who are the key players that will bring the energy, expertise and resources to lead the network?

Collaborating

Which existing platforms can feed into each other to sustain and nurture work?

Seeding projects

How can you support getting art/tech out to the public?

Defining your purpose

Capturing a shared vision for how a network will deliver a pipeline for work will enable you to advocate for the value of what you are doing, ensuring that your partners and collaborators understand your goals, and creating a robust strategy for understanding what you can say "no" to and how you can measure its success.

Working with a small group of partners to focus this important step is essential in order to capture the ambitions of everyone involved and ensure that whilst you are looking for distinct mission statement, everyone feels as if their voice is represented and heard.

Collusion's mission:

Position Collusion at the heart of an East Anglia hub for interdisciplinary art/tech practice, connecting the creative sector, HEIs, and the technology industry along a Cambridge to Norwich corridor that drives creative, social and economic growth in the area.

As you work towards a clear vision for ART // TECH // PLAY in helping to deliver that ambition think about the steps that will get you there. These can be structured in a logical way, starting with the resources and staff skills, to the outputs (activities) that will in turn generate a short and long term outcomes. By doing so you will arrive that the big "why" - the ultimate impact that you want to see for art/tech practice, artists, venues, organisations and the public.

Flow's Three Lenses tool can help you explore that impact - what's your context and what do you want to enable.
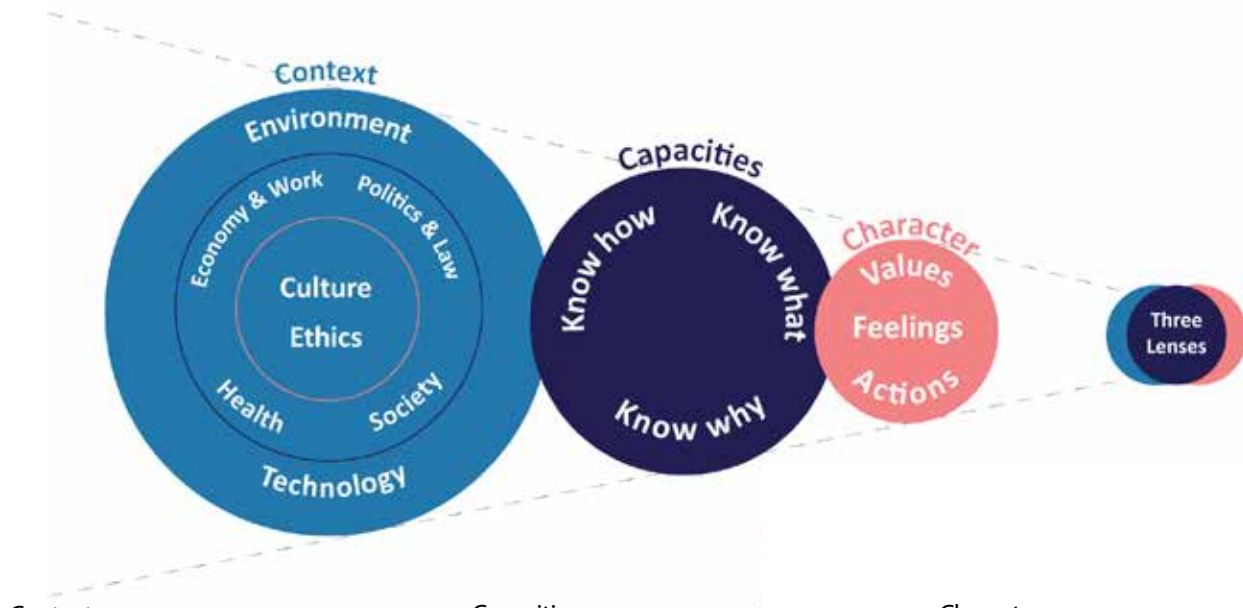
Context

- Enable access to culture and resources
- Having diversity in people and places
- Recognising that access to developing works is inequitable
- A lack of funding requires collaboration and partnership
- There is an appetite for new types of cultural experiences...
- ...but access to these is hampered by a lack of inclusion and a poor economy

Capacities:

- Supporting learning and participation in art/tech
- Role models and networks to create "institutional capital"
- Understanding high quality cultural production
- Knowing your existing audiences and those you aren't reaching
- Democratic practices
- A clear sense of purpose

Character:

- People acquire the cultural capacity to take work to production
- Motivation and confidence
- Playful and imaginative
- Valued culture
- Diverse and actively inclusive
- Critical thinking
- Collaborative

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Explore a model for an Art/Tech network

Build on those partnerships to create a new collaborative local model to develop an action plan which strengthens networks, opportunities and access and inclusion. Art // Tech // Play is already one such model which is practice-led and enables artists at any stage of their career to connect with others to grow their networks, learn new skills and experiment with their practice.

Collusion have the strong foundation of Art //Tech // Play to build from. It enables access to knowledge, access to tech and testing, skills training resources and a network of engaged practitioners. Which areas is the network already strong in and where can it look to expand? The ongoing challenge will be to evolve the model to ensure it remains accessible, inclusive and meaningful for artists working at the intersection of art and technology. Elements of successful initiatives to build on include the Collusion residency programme for alumni, which provided funding to support the development of practice and work, and the leverage of that funding being used to support match funding requirements from other grants.

Exploring membership models for Art // Tech // Play would enable Collusion to both build a sense of buy in to the network as well as generating funds to be reinvested in supporting artists. Larger organisations, such as cultural bodies, venues and HEIs, may join as supporters, whilst there could also be tiers for individual artists and for startup businesses and tech sector partners.

To take works to a level of production a model for sharing art/tech with the public a network would need to foster a sense of shared ownership and build a joined reputation and weight. Bringing together organisations who want to support art/tech with the purpose of exhibiting and performing finished works may require joint commissioning, local touring, sharing spaces and resources and most importantly, a core leadership group of organisations who can work together to make it happen.

Leadership

A consortium of organisations established with this aim will have greater leverage in not only leveraging funding but also in advocating for and harnessing the resources within their own buildings. Collusion's exisiting partners: Norwich Theatre, The Junction, Anglia Ruskin University, Norwich University of the Arts and Cambridge University, have the reputation and potential leverage to create the momentum needed to drive a consortium forward. The leadership group have a core role to play in setting the targets for the network, the actions required, the responsibilities of its leaders and supporters, timescales, resources and how you will identify and measure success. There is also the potential to consider what leadership looks like at joined up regional or national level. Key regions in art/tech also include Bath and Bristol as well as Manchester and the North-East. Bringing together key players from these influential areas outside of London can be a show of strength as well as build a space for sharing knowledge and practice.

Collaborate

Formalising collaborations will support the ways that your priorities can be sustained and advanced. This may include looking for support from local and regional councils, as well as the wealth of creative organisations and businesses in the area. Positioning yourselves locally as driving innovation and creativity by working with others will help to harness opportunities for investment and more integrated working. The creation of a Cambridge Creative Cluster offering a formalisation of the talent in the area can enhance place based collaboration around a shared set of strategic priorities, including collaboration with the tech sector.

There may be other resources which can be tapped into to build artists, and organisations, strengths in entrepreneurship. A common gap in art/tech is understanding how to create a sustainable business through works. Growth and innovation, fundraising, communications and business planning are often supported through local schemes, such as BIPC (Business and IP Centre) Cambridgeshire, and signposting partners to these would increase the overall capacities of network members to think through how they "get to market".

The emerging policy of Creative Corridors offers a potential future area for strengthening collaborative working and investment across the region. This creative clusters are being seen as a way to build prosperous creative industries across UK regions by joining up strategies and resources across creative and non-creative businesses and organisations, transferring knowledge and building opportunities between sectors. This is particularly pertinent for art/tech works which tend to be multidisciplinary. It also offers an opportunity to build a networks leadership - being able to showcase an area's creative strengths and sense of place.

The Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge corridor has already been identified as the UK's key knowledge network. The RSA's "Creative Corridors: Connecting clusters to unleash potential", 2024, also identified the Cambridge area as having a critical mass of creative practice and businesses. Mapping these out as a network and finding a shared way to communicate about this strength

Photo credit: Matthew Usher photography - Collusion's The Intergalactic Hanseatic League, King's Lynn (2021)

HEIs appear to be an ideal fit for collaborations with Art // Tech //Play, with both sharing interests and goals of research, collaboration, knowledge sharing and public impact. Opportunities for artists to work with researchers recognise these goals and are mutually beneficial, with artists being able to collaborate, access resources and create work which explores new forms of knowledge, whilst researchers are able to find fresh ways of exploring and communicating their research, working in a way which when done well, is a collaborative. Such collaboration and partnership also offers the potential for artists to access fresh sources of funding from research grants whilst enabling researchers to explore innovative methods of communicating the value of their work through Public Engagement with Research (PER). Collusion's strong existing relationships with Cambrdge University, Anglia Ruskin University and Norwich University of the Arts, are a pipeline not only to innovation but also to increased membership of the network by offering students the chance to be in a professional forum to develop their practice.

Seed projects

Getting work out to the public is going to energise and push the network on to further work. Identifying how work can be shared, where it is hosted and how open he calls to exhibit or perform are, will help shape how projects are seeded at any stage of their development.

There is often a reluctance to share work in progress from the perspective of both artists and venues but this needs to be recognised as a limiting factor in being able to move works from being concepts to finalised pieces. Festivals such as Cambridge Festival or decentralised platforms such as Being Human, the festival of arts and humanities research supported by the School of Advanced Study at University of London, may be an opportunity to share research and bring together HEIs, practitioners and the public.

The model of the V&A's Digital Design Weekend, where space to create open dialogue between artists, designers and audiences to promote digital art and design, holds the possibility of creating exciting programming without the need to bring in completed works. Showing pieces under development, processes and exploring ideas enables artists and the public to come together to think about art/tech, making and working collaboratively.

Sharing work in this way, with the purpose of it being exploratory, a place for discussion and experimentation, lends itself to multidisciplinary art, tech and performance. It is also an ideal platform for academic partners to share emerging research or to

engage the public in participatory research. It can also be flexible to its venue, either making use of an existing partner or a new site.

Co-commissioning and producing between partners and making use of the shared resources and expertise to bring developing work to fruition. The shared financial and creative input from partners helps to make projects possible and also to guarantee a life onwards from their completion by enabling to move to new venues and audiences. The Creative Estuary project had particular success in co-commissioning between cultural, business and local authority partners, enabling artists to work on large scale commissions and raise the awareness of the creative talent in the area. Major players such as Factory International also have a strong co-commissioning programme with other festival partners which enables work to tour not only elsewhere in the UK but also globally.

Collusion's commitment to building and growing the capacity of the sector will create the conditions for these seeded projects to thrive. For example, the online resources such as skills tutorials from Art // Tech // Play network artists benefit not only those in the group but offer an open resource to anyone looking to explore different ways of making works. The newsletter currently reaches around 1000 people, connecting them to upcoming opportunities and events acting a vital targetted resource for artists and partners. The website hosts resources and listings and does so accessibly. An update to the website could be used to forefront the benefits of the network and bring in more partner actitivities, as well as mirroring some of the functions of the newsletter, setting it as the go to place for art/tech resources and news.

Many thanks to those who were willing
to share their time to discuss the
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